

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (original): A method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer which comprises producing said stabilized fluoropolymer by subjecting a treatment target substance containing a sulfonic-acid-derived-group-containing fluoropolymer to a fluorination treatment, wherein said sulfonic-acid-derived-group-containing fluoropolymer is a fluoropolymer containing $-\text{SO}_3\text{M}$ (in which M represents H, $\text{NR}^1\text{R}^2\text{R}^3\text{R}^4$ or $\text{M}^1_{1/\text{L}}$; R^1 , R^2 , R^3 and R^4 are the same or different and each represents H or an alkyl group containing 1 to 4 carbon atoms; and M^1 represents an L-valent metal), and said treatment target substance has a moisture content of not higher than 500 ppm by mass.

2. (original): The method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 1, wherein the sulfonic-acid-derived-group-containing fluoropolymer further contains $-\text{SO}_2\text{X}$ and/or $-\text{COZ}$ (wherein X represents F, Cl, Br, I or $-\text{NR}^5\text{R}^6$ and Z represents $-\text{NR}^7\text{R}^8$ or $-\text{OR}^9$; R^5 , R^6 , R^7 and R^8 are the same or different and each represents H, an alkali metal element, an alkyl group or a sulfonyl-containing group and R^9 represents an alkyl group containing 1 to 4 carbon atoms).

3. (currently amended): The method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 1-~~or 2~~,

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wherein the sulfonic-acid-derived-group-containing fluoropolymer further contains –COOH at the polymer chain terminus or termini.

4. (currently amended): The method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 1, ~~2 or 3~~,

wherein the fluorination treatment is carried out using a gaseous fluorinating agent comprising a fluorine source,

said fluorine source is at least one species selected from the group consisting of F₂, SF₄, IF₅, NF₃, PF₅, ClF and ClF₃ and

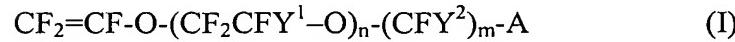
said fluorine source amounts to not less than 1% by volume of said gaseous fluorinating agent.

5. (original): The method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 4, wherein the fluorine source is F₂.

6. (currently amended): The method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 1, ~~2, 3, 4 or 5~~,

wherein the sulfonic-acid-derived-group-containing fluoropolymer is a copolymer which is at least binary comprising

an acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether represented by the general formula (I):



(wherein Y¹ represents F, Cl, Br, I or a perfluoroalkyl group, n represents an integer of 0 to 3; n atoms/groups of Y¹ are the same or different; Y² represents F, Cl, Br or I; m represents an integer

of 1 to 5; when m is an integer of 2 to 5, m atoms of Y² are the same or different; A represents –SO₂X or –COZ; X represents F, Cl, Br, I or –NR⁵R⁶ and Z represents –NR⁷R⁸ or –OR⁹; R⁵, R⁶, R⁷ and R⁸ are the same or different and each represents H, an alkali metal element, an alkyl group or a sulfonyl-containing group and R⁹ represents an alkyl group containing 1 to 4 carbon atoms) and

a copolymerizable monomer with said acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether, said copolymerizable monomer is an “other vinyl ether” other than said acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether and an ethylenic monomer,

said copolymer comprises 5 to 40 mole percent of an acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether unit derived from said acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether, 60 to 95 mole percent of an ethylenic monomer unit derived from said ethylenic monomer and 0 to 5 mole percent of an “other vinyl ether unit” derived from said “other vinyl ether”.

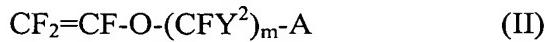
7. (original): The method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 6, wherein n is 0 (zero).

8. (currently amended): The method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 6 or 7,

wherein Y² is F and m is 2.

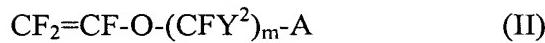
9. (original): A stabilized fluoropolymer obtained via polymerization of an acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether represented by the general formula (II):

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(wherein Y² represents F, Cl, Br or I, m represents an integer of 1 to 5; when m is an integer of 2 to 5, m atoms of Y² are the same or different; and A represents -SO₂X or -COZ; X represents F, Cl, Br, I or -NR⁵R⁶ and Z represents -NR⁷R⁸ or -OR⁹; R⁵, R⁶, R⁷ and R⁸ are the same or different and each represents H, an alkali metal element, an alkyl group or a sulfonyl-containing group and R⁹ represents an alkyl group containing 1 to 4 carbon atoms), and tetrafluoroethylene, wherein said stabilized fluoropolymer shows an intensity ratio [x/y] between carboxyl group-due peak [x] and -CF₂- due peak [y] of not higher than 0.05 in IR measurement.

10. (original): A stabilized fluoropolymer obtained via polymerization of an acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether represented by the general formula (II):



(wherein Y² represents F, Cl, Br or I, m represents an integer of 1 to 5; when m is an integer of 2 to 5, m atoms of Y² are the same or different; and A represents -SO₂X or -COZ; X represents F, Cl, Br, I or -NR⁵R⁶ and Z represents -NR⁷R⁸ or -OR⁹; R⁵, R⁶, R⁷ and R⁸ are the same or different and each represents H, an alkali metal element, an alkyl group or a sulfonyl-containing group and R⁹ represents an alkyl group containing 1 to 4 carbon atoms) and tetrafluoroethylene, wherein, in a hydrolyzate of said stabilized fluoropolymer, the number [X] of main chain terminal -CF₃ groups per 1 x 10⁵ main chain carbon atoms of said hydrolyzate is not smaller than 10 as calculated using an integrated intensity due to main chain terminal -CF₃ groups and an integrated intensity due to -CF₂- adjacent to an ether bond in side chains branched from the main chain in said hydrolyzate, each determined by solid state ¹⁹F nuclear magnetic resonance

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spectrometry of said hydrolyzate in a state swollen in an oxygen-containing hydrocarbon compound having a dielectric constant of not lower than 5.0 and further using an ion exchange equivalent weight Ew value determined by titrimetric method.

11. (original): The stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 10,
wherein said fluoropolymer further shows an intensity ratio [x/y] between carboxyl group-due peak [x] and -CF₂- due peak [y] of not higher than 0.05 in IR measurement.

12. (currently amended): The stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 9, ~~10 or 11~~,
wherein the polymerization of the acid-derived group-containing perhalovinyl ether and tetrafluoroethylene is carried out in the manner of emulsion polymerization.

13. (currently amended): The stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 9, ~~10, 11 or 12~~,
which is obtained by the method ~~for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer~~ according to Claim 7.

14. (currently amended): A stabilized fluoropolymer,
which is obtained by the method for producing a stabilized fluoropolymer according to ~~Claim 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8~~Claim 1.

15. (currently amended): The stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 9, ~~10, 11, 12, 13 or 14~~,

which has a melt index of 0.1 to 20 g/10 minutes as measured under the conditions of 270°C and a load of 2.16 kg according to JIS K 7210.

16. (currently amended): A polymer electrolyte membrane, which contains a hydrolyzate of the stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 9, ~~10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15~~.

17. (original): The polymer electrolyte membrane according to Claim 16, wherein the amount of fluoride ion eluted by Fenton treatment comprising immersing **b** grams of said polymer electrolyte membrane in **a** liters of an aqueous hydrogen peroxide solution having an initial iron(II) cation concentration of 2 ppm and an initial hydrogen peroxide concentration of 1% by mass at a membrane/bath ratio [b/a] of 3.2 and maintaining the whole at 80°C for 2 hours is not greater than 11×10^{-4} parts by mass per 100 parts by mass of said polymer electrolyte membrane.

18. (currently amended): An active substance-immobilized material which comprises a hydrolyzate of the stabilized fluoropolymer according to Claim 9, ~~10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15~~ and an active substance.

19. (original): The active substance-immobilized material according to Claim 18, wherein the active substance is a catalyst.

20. (original): The active substance-immobilized material according to Claim 19,
wherein the catalyst is a platinum-containing metal.

21. (currently amended): A membrane/electrode assembly comprising a polymer
electrolyte membrane and an electrode,
wherein said membrane/electrode assembly satisfies at least one condition selected from the
group consisting of the conditions (1) and (2) given below:

- (1) said polymer electrolyte membrane is the polymer electrolyte membrane according to Claim
~~16-or-17~~, and
- (2) said electrode is the active substance-immobilized material according to Claim 18,~~19-or-20~~.

22. (original): A solid polymer electrolyte fuel cell which comprises the
membrane/electrode assembly according to Claim 21.